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Children exposed to the Language Experience Approach are able to conceptualize that what they think about they can say; what they say can be written or dictated to the teacher; what has been written can be read; and that they can read what they have written, and what others have written for them to read. It is recommended that a child first begin the reading program in his native language with the help of a bilingual teacher or teacher aide. When ready, he begins the reading programs in English. Initially, he expresses his experience in some graphic form such as drawing, painting, or clay work, and then tells his experience to the teacher and the other children. He dictates his story about the picture to the teacher in his own words, with the teacher writing the story about the picture in his language, the way he says it. He begins to write by tracing over the teacher's writing and eventually writes out his own stories, which are bound and become part of the basic and supplementary reading program. In his discussion of this approach to teaching reading in a bilingual preschool program, the author describes the basic assumptions, the advantages, and the flexibility in organization and scheduling. He concludes with several stories representing various levels of English proficiency, written by bilingual children in California and Massachusetts. (AMM)

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TEBRETSOL: THE LEA
(Teaching Beginning Reading to Speakers of Other Languages: The Language Experience Approach)*

When we talk about teaching beginning reading to speakers of other languages at the elementary school level, we must consider a number of possible teaching situations. First, there are those youngsters that enter school at age 3 or 4 in our Headstart Programs. Then, there are youngsters that enter school in kindergarten or grade one. Finally, there are youngsters that enter school in grades 2 - 8, transferring in from other schools and from other countries. Philosophically, too, we must also come to grips with the question of whether to teach beginning reading first in the native language of the student, whether to teach beginning reading only in the English language, or, whether to teach beginning reading in both languages?

I want to make my position clear at the outset. I believe in, and am committed to bilingual education. Thus, I believe in teaching reading in two languages. Our nation has not capitalized upon the tremendous storehouse of languages and cultures represented among us. I don't believe in the "melting pot concept" simply because it has produced a nation of monolinguals. I do believe, however, in nurturing the native languages and cultures of our students while they learn our ways and our speech.

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And too, it should be further emphasized, that bilingual education should not be the privilege of Spanish speakers alone, but the privilege of English speakers, French, German, Portuguese, Chinese, Japanese, Italian, and any other speakers as well. When you pause and think about our past attitudes toward speakers of other languages in our country, haven't we really missed the boat? We have had the greatest opportunity as a nation to become multi-cultural and multi-lingual, probably more so than any country in the world. Instead, we who have been born in foreign countries, or, have had parents that were born in foreign countries, have been shamed into turning our backs on our first language. In fact, many of us probably chose another language to study in high school or college, or didn't even study a foreign language at all. This attitude toward other languages and other cultures in our country has permeated all the way through to our Federal government. Did you know that Teddy Roosevelt while President of the United States told a group of immigrants about to become citizens to forget their languages and their cultures as soon as possible and to speak and act American? Hopefully, we are now on our way to the full realization that the many languages represented among us in the United States are an asset and not a liability. Those of us who already speak another language and have a feel for the culture of that language already know this. We just have to convince others that this is so!

The basic philosophical rationale underlying bilingual education, in my opinion, is based upon the assumption that the child's ability in his native language should be encouraged and expanded while learning English. Subject matter content would first be taught in the native language of the student and a gradual introduction of the English language would take place. Eventually, more English would be introduced, and

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English and the native language of the student would both serve as the medium for instruction.

For years in most school districts in the United States, we've been nonchalantly expecting children who don't speak English to arrive in English speaking classrooms and keep up with their English-speaking contemporaries. We have also assumed that non-English speaking youngsters are as ready to read in English as their English speaking counterparts. Both of these assumptions are fallacious! In fact, they have led to an approach sometimes referred to as the "osmosis approach" where youngsters are supposed to absorb English through their pores in some magical way. Of course, this approach has been a complete failure in meeting the needs of the millions of non-English speakers in the United States. For example, Mexican-American and Puerto Rican youngsters become frustrated and discouraged as soon as they arrive in school, falling farther and farther behind with the passing of each year. By the time they reach 8th grade, approximately 50% drop out.

Fortunately, things are beginning to change. Money is being made available for bilingual education programs in such areas as research, teacher training, teacher aides, preschool programs, and, materials and equipment. We are certainly on our way to the full realization of the potential of each individual.

I would like to present some basic assumptions concerning the development of a beginning reading program for speakers of other languages. From these assumptions, I will develop the Language Experience Approach to reading.

1. It is assumed that the non-English speaking child entering school should begin the reading readiness program in his native

language before he begins the reading readiness program in the English language.

2. It is assumed that there is a need for prior audio-lingual training in the English language before the child is introduced to the more formal reading program in English.

3. Because of the various readiness factors involved, it is assumed that it would be desireable to introduce reading instruction in the native language of the student at the beginning stages of school, and later introduce reading instruction in English. However, reading instruction in the native language of the student and reading instruction in English would continue throughout the program.

4. It is assumed that a beginning reading program for non-English speakers should take into consideration the linguistic problems of the recipients, and be culturally fair as well.

5. It is assumed that a bi-lingual reading program is desireable not only for the non-English speaking child, but also for the English speaking child.

Now that we have set the stage, I feel ready to discuss the Language Experience Approach (LEA) to reading which is dear to my heart for a number of reasons. First, I have had the good fortune of becoming deeply involved in this approach while a staff member of the Department of Education, San Diego County, and more recently at San Diego State College. We who have worked at the County Office in San Diego like to

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think that we had something to do with the refining of the approach and moving it from a position of infancy to its present position of being recognized nationally and internationally. The one man who has done more for the development of the Language Experience Approach to reading is R. Van Allen. Van, was formerly Director of Curriculum at the County Office in San Diego, and is now Professor of Education at the University of Arizona at Tuscon. Another reason for being excited about the Language Experience Approach is that it has tremendous implications for beginning reading instruction in any language. In fact, many school districts across the country are presently using the approach for native speakers of English, for students with a non-standard dialect, and with non-English speakers as well.

The Language Experience Approach capitalizes upon the storehouse of listening and speaking vocabulary that youngsters either possess or develop at school or in the home. Quite often, this storehouse of words exceeds by far the limited, restricted vocabulary usually appearing in our standard basal reading series. The LEA values the language and thinking of each child based upon his own experiences. The teacher recognizes that each child brings to school a unique language personality. He strives to preserve the individual's personal language at the same time that certain common understandings and skills are being habituated. The LEA requires that each child be given opportunities to work individually with the teacher, to work in small groups, and to work in the total class as well. In each situation the child is expected to express and record his own thoughts, ideas, aspirations, and ideals as well as to read and understand the thinking of others. His own expression is encouraged through such activities as painting, drawing, speaking, and writing.

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Student-prepared materials are used as basic sources of reading along with other printed materials which are developed for general reading and the expressed purpose of teaching reading skills. The use of commercially prepared reading materials become a part of the overall instructional program to help in providing a balanced reading program and to increase the skills of word recognition and interpretation of reading.

Youngsters exposed to the Language Experience Approach are able to conceptualize that:

- what they think about they can say;
- what they say can be written (or dictated to the teacher);
- what has been written can be read;
- they can read what they have written and what others have written for them to read.

Based upon my previous assumptions, it is recommended that a youngster first begin the reading program in his native language with the help of a bilingual teacher or teacher aide. When ready, he would begin the reading program in English as well. The pattern of instruction that I'm going to discuss will begin at the pre-school level or kindergarten and move on from there. For those that are interested in other grade levels, it should not be too difficult to make the application. It should be mentioned that strict adherance to the order as presented is not demanded of all students.

- Initially the child expresses his experience in some graphic form such as drawing, painting, or clay work. This initial expression can take place at the preschool level, kindergarten, or at any time the youngster begins the reading program.
- The youngster next tells his experience, which he has portrayed graphically, to the teacher and/or other children.
- Next, he dictates his story about the picture to the teacher

in his own words. The teacher writes the story for the youngster under the picture in his language - the way he says it.

- When ready, the youngster begins to write by tracing over the teacher's writing of his story.

- Eventually, the youngster writes out his own stories with the help of the teacher and with the help of basic word lists that are made available by the teacher, the school district, or, developed by the total class.

- Stories and illustrations completed by children are bound into books and become part of the basic and supplementary reading program. These books can be individual children's books, total class books, specific subject related books.

- Other reading materials are later introduced such as basal texts, trade books, magazines, newspapers, etc.

- Skills in phonetic analysis, structural analysis, comprehension, vocabulary, spelling and others, are taught on an "as needed" basis.

- Vocabulary control rests in the hands of the youngsters based upon their backgrounds of experience.

- Teachers strive to broaden backgrounds of experience for all youngsters through demonstrations, films, displays, study trips, listening to stories, providing high-frequency word lists, talking about real experiences, associating names and objects with pictures, painting, modeling with clay and paper, playing word games, interpreting pictures, singing, creative dramatics, choral speaking, feeling, smelling, tasting, and observing.

The Language Experience Approach allows for great flexibility in organization and scheduling.

In working with the total class group the teacher would become involved in such activities as: reading to the children; having children read to the class; holding class discussions; teaching some basic skills that the entire class may need; introducing games and independent activities; extending experiences through films, filmstrips, walks, and study trips.

In working with small groups of youngsters the teacher would: take dictation; work with pupils to develop attitudes about reading and writing;

develop basic sight vocabulary and word attack skills; play games to practice skills; have children read from individual and class books that include their own contributions; provide special instruction on an "as needed" basis.

In serving as a resource person, the teacher helps with individual projects and independent activities such as: taking dictation from a child who has painted a picture; helping a child with writing practice; suggesting ideas for individual books; helping with spelling; furnishing words for youngsters that are reading independently; helping youngsters to choose an independent activity, typing or arranging for typing of individual and class books.

The Advantages of using a Language Experience Approach for speakers of other languages are many. Some of the more obvious ones are:

- By starting the reading program in the native language of the student, youngsters experience success from the very first day of school.
- It places all the communication skills at the core of the elementary school curriculum.
- It requires abundant use of self-expression with many art media.
- It makes use of multi-sensory experiences such as music and physical activities.
- It utilizes the content of science, social studies, and mathematics as bases for language development.
- It values the language of each child, faulty as it may be, as a beginning point for further development. In so doing it puts the thinking of each child at the heart of the teaching-learning process.
- Because the approach is highly personalized, youngsters become vitally interested in reading and writing.
- Because the LEA does not require, nor does it recommend ability groups labeling youngsters "low", "middle" and "high", and because there are no typical graded materials that tend to lock youngsters

into these groups, children feel good about reading and about themselves, especially the ones that have been traditionally placed into "low" groups.

- Because the materials read are written and illustrated by the students themselves based upon their backgrounds of experience, the approach is culture-fair and very meaningful to them. No child is placed at a serious disadvantage because his oral language is significantly divergent from the language of standard reading texts.

- Readiness factors are accounted for in a very natural way. Youngsters are not forced into a reading program. They simply begin reading when they are able to express themselves. Thus, they read only those materials that they understand and can say.

- It allows for effective use of bilingual aides, parents, older children, and volunteers, all with one goal in mind -- to help each youngster achieve his maximum potential.

- Team teaching arrangments can be used to great advantage. Monolingual teachers can be used to teach in their language teaming with bilingual teachers or aides.

- The approach is individualized and ungraded allowing each youngster to move as far and as fast as he is able to progress.

- Children learn to spell the words of highest frequency at the same time that they learn to recognize them as sight words.

- Phonics and linguistics play an integral part of each day's learning in that youngsters learn and practice the relationships between sounds and symbols as they experience them in listening, speaking, writing and reading. They also learn the many irregularities in the English language in the same way.

- Youngsters develop a level of independence in making choices in writing and reading which are seldom observed among those who study with highly structured programs.

- The program provides that all youngsters participate in a variety of expressive arts. The added time given to language study does not eliminate art, music, dramatization, and rhythmic activities. All these are required when children are expected to express their own ideas.

No discussion of the Language Experience Approach is complete without hearing from the kids. Here are a few stories written in English by children who speak other languages in San Diego County, California and Cambridge, Massachusetts. It should be mentioned that these stories

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represent various levels of English proficiency which will be quite obvious to you.

This is my house.
My sister is in the house.
She is in bed.

Graciela

This is an orange juice tree.
It does not have oranges.
It has juice.

David

Hippos are very big.
They live in the water.
They eat grass.
They do not eat meat.

Christina

I just moved to San Diego. I used to live in Tijuana. I have eight brothers and sisters. I am the oldest. I take care of the baby. I help my Mother fix dinner. When my Mother is sick I have to help her. I don't like school very much because I don't understand anything. I miss all my friends. My teacher can speak Spanish and she talks to me. I like that. I have two friends, Marta and Maria. They don't speak English so we speak Spanish. I play with them.

Norma

My name is José. I am eleven years old. I go to Logan School. I'm in the fifth grade. I have six brothers and sisters.

I used to live in Tijuana. I liked it there because I had many friends. I knew lots of people and I always had fun. We learned lots of things in school. My teacher was very nice.

We moved to San Diego because my father got a good job here. I don't have as many friends here, so I don't like it much. I don't understand what people say to me. Sometimes people laugh at me because I talk different.

I want to learn English. Everyday I learn more, but it is very hard.

José

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When we come to the United States we don't know anything. We may be able to write English, but not to understand or speak it. The hardest thing that I found in English is pronunciation. The curious thing is that the babies here cry the same as in my country.

José Romero
Columbia

My family is composed of four people. The first one is my father. He is the boss of the house, and he gives orders to me and my brother. Then there's my mother. She is the vice-boss, and she orders us too.

John Cornelio
Italy

Americans like psychology. They always try to solve their problems with it. But many of them don't use psychology in their lives.

For example, they never understand the foreigners' hearts. Also, they like to use computers. But machines can never know the human heart.

Sayuri Miura
Japan

The Language Experience Approach to reading takes into consideration the language and thinking of each child based upon his own experiences. To the many children who have experienced authorship in their language as well as in English, reading is not lessons, frustration, low groups, worksheets, practice exercises, or a time of the day to dread. Instead, it is something beautiful; a time to look forward to; a time to bring experiences to life.

The End

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